

AUGUST 2, 1984

Every morning I sit out in the backyard at the ranch, waiting for the sun to rise. The dawn holds back the heat; the orange-lighted sky seems undecided how to plan the day.

After the sun rises, I move into the kitchen table to watch the blue quail strut to tile feed ground, leading their fluffy feathered chicks, opening the way for the cottontail rabbits to join in the feast. It's when I'm watching the animal show or reading that I charcoal the bacon and demolish the toast. The coffee boils over and the wanderings of my mind and sight are stopped by the smell of smoke.

Galley work isn't that alien of a trade for me. Were I assigned to an underground kitchen without books and papers to read, rich yellow omelets would slide from my skillets, and crepes and quiches would make fanfares of bubbling white cheeses and dainty mushroom caps.

It's not that I'm not a good cook., It's that I'm a better dreamer and reader than I am a pot watcher or a toaster guard. Another place where I drift off is on grocery shopping trips. Other than red root radishes and dead yellow turnip stumps, I can't resist a vegetable bin. I hit fresh fruits like I was hosting a Hawaiian beach party. On any day, I buy pork chops like all eight children were still at home.

Yet in spite of the overloads, I run out of some items. For example, last week, to work myself out from under an avocado glut, I used avocados on my cold cereal. Avocadoes have the same consistency as bananas. Their soft meat picks up the cereal like those fancy appetizers that are served at standup cocktail parties and are called "porcupines." The only objection I know of to avocados with cereal is that unless they are eaten in a hurry the milk turns a mossy green.

First I tried brown food coloring to shade the green. Finally a friend of mine that's an artist said to use orange coloring to turn the milk a more palatable grey. In the male kitchen, food colorings are a big help. Last winter I was stuck on a long run of canned chicken noodle soup. Once I learned to rainbow the yellows and the whites, I was able to eat the last six cans without a blindfold.

Yesterday before I went inside the house, I was treated to a matched race. Just as I was sitting down, a jackrabbit shot through the back fence, pursued by a red fox. The race passed within 15 paces of my chair. I am no good at calling rabbit lengths at that speed, but I can tell you for sure it was going to take a change in track advantage or a bad fall to predict the winner, as they were both running a good race.

Red fox was brought to the Shortgrass Country for hounds to run, or for hounds to run way behind the foxes; howling and getting lost from the pack is a better way to put it. Our old jackrabbits developed their speed also from outrunning hunting dogs that couldn't keep their mind on the trail. So you might say that each species developed from the sport of hunting. However, unless one of our jacks breaks down in his hocks from crouching too much, I'm going to say a fox or a hound had better be serious if he's going to catch one of ours.

I was too slow to see the end of the race. The quail flew off into the brush and the cottontails scurried under the house. I can't take this much action every morning of the week. But for now if you don't mind, this is the way I want to live.